

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Veteran's Name: Harrell Smith

Meyer: David Meyer (O'Shea)

Date of Interview: August 26, 2006 (?) and August 1, 2009

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Transcribed on: August 18, 2017

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Part 1, from 2006 Chicago reunion, (possibly August 26th, 2006). Short interview in which Mr. Harrell Smith talks about memorabilia he brought to the reunion.

Harrell Smith: It was done by Sigmund. He put all this together. This is the biography, and this is the thing that – well, one of our guys made a Purple Heart. He took a picture of his Purple Heart, and he made a thing, a picture. And when I got that from him I went down and I took a picture of my thing here.

And this is what Omar Bradley said about an infantryman. He said that at the end of the [inaudible], “those who are left to fight, fight on, end in death. But knowing that each day of evasion they have exhausted one more chance of survival. Sooner or later, unless victory comes, this chase must end on either a litter or the grave.” And that’s pretty straight [laughs].

David Meyer: That’s pretty straight. Holy cow.

Smith: He ain’t kidding there. But my name is Harrell Smith. And anyway, these are things, this is a mailing list that he kept. These are pictures of various times. I don't know, I’m in here somewhere but I can’t ... I think this was one of the, that’s Crawford right here. And then this is the bridge, and this is an artist thing of it.

Meyer: That’s the bridge that they blew?

Smith: Yes, see it blew from here. But this is an artist view, that ain’t a photograph [laughs]. Then this is a picture that somebody took over there in one of these little boats that they were trying to get across the Moselle River with. But he goes on through here, and like Crawford’s boat, and the colonel Malcolm or something like that. Anyway, I never did know him, he came after I was gone.

Meyer: After you were shot, when did you get back to --?

Smith: Well, the way I got back is I went back to a schoolhouse. And they had a field hospital, the 30th Field Hospital. And I stayed there for ten days. And in ten days I started moving back, and I don’t really know where I moved until I got to an airfield. Well, I got back to an airfield and they flew me back to England. Right outside of Oxford, England. And we were in Quonset huts, so a field hospital there.

And then they had the Battle of the Bulge, which happened in December. And when they had that Battle of the Bulge, the hospital was practically empty. I mean, for all intents and purpose. And then they started coming in from France, they were flying them directly off the

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

battlefield. And when they did, they got filled up. So they came and asked me, they said, "Would you like to be home for Christmas?"

And I said, "Sure I would. How am I going to get there?"

And they said, "We'll put you on a plane tomorrow and take you back to the States."

And I said, "If you're going to put me on one of those planes like you put me on from France over to here," I said, "I'll wait. That's too much." I said, "You know, that gets to be too much."

And anyway, he says, "Well, you might have to wait a couple of months."

I said, "I don't care how long I wait."

Meyer: What was the plane ride like from France to the hospital?

Smith: Oh my God, man. They had one of these little C-47s, of which you know as the DC-3, which is a little two-motor, uh, parachute. They use to take parajumpers on it to jump. But they put in cots. And they went around the fuselage, and you didn't have that much room between the guy and you and the next...

Meyer: Holy cow. Four inches.

Smith: So I said, "No, I can't take that again." So anyway, they said okay. So I caught a hospital ship back on Valentine's Day, on February fourteenth. And we landed in Charleston, South Carolina. And I went to my hometown, at that time was Memphis, Tennessee. And I went to a hospital in Memphis and I was hospitalized for the next two years. Then I was discharged in '46. But it was a long ride [laughs]. But people, when I tell them that story now they say, "Man I can't believe you wouldn't have taken the plane."

I said, "If you'd ridden from France to England, looking at two inches above you with another man's butt in your face [laughs], I think you would have --"

Meyer: No, sure, you wouldn't have wanted to go across the Atlantic like that.

Smith: No. I said, "No, I ain't going to do that." I said, "If you've got a bigger plane I'll do it." They said, "Well, we don't have any bigger planes."

I said, "Well, when I was at the airstrip in France I saw them take a general, a German general that they'd captured, and he was the only one in there besides the crew, and they took him back to Washington." And I said, "If it was good enough for him get me one." [laughs].

They said, "Well, we can't arrange that."

Meyer: Mr. Smith, what was your final rank?

Smith: PFC [Private First Class]. So I was one of the ones that was not in the know. I came back, went to college. Got a degree, got an advanced degree, and so forth. A lot of us did. And I worked all my life. I made good money all my life.

Part 2, extended 2009 interview in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Meyer: Hello. This is David Meyer, son of Earl D. Meyer, Company H, 379th. It is now August 1, 2009, and I am continuing an interview that was partly done three years ago in Chicago, a few minutes. And then last year in Toledo. We are in the Biltmore Oklahoma City Hotel. It is now four minutes after noon, in the atrium right across from the meeting room. And I have the great pleasure again to talk to Mr. Smith. Could you say and spell your name?

Smith: Harrell, H-a-r-r-e-l-l, Smith, S-m-i-t-h.

Meyer: Okay. I'll ask the introductory questions again. Mr. Smith, what's your address?

Smith: My address is 8460 Dickens Avenue, Brooksville, Florida.

Meyer: What's your zip code?

Smith: 34613.

Meyer: And your telephone number?

Smith: Area code 352-596-6395.

Meyer: And where was your place of birth?

Smith: My place of birth was New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

Meyer: And what is your birth date?

Smith: My birthday is on October the 21st, 1925.

Meyer: And the place in Florida, how do you spell that?

Smith: Oh gosh. N-e-w, it's two words, Smyrna, S-m-y-n-e-r.

Meyer: New Smyner. [brief discussion of spelling]

Smith: Yeah.

Meyer: Okay, that's great. And though it's obvious, what's your branch of service?

Smith: I was in the 95th Division.

Meyer: What was your company?

Smith: Company I, 378th Battalion. Infantry Battalion.

Meyer: And what was your highest rank?

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

Smith: PFC [Private First Class].

Meyer: PFC. Okay. I'll stop this just for a second. [interruption, loud cart rolling by]

Smith: All sorts of noises.

Meyer: All sorts of noises. All sorts of noises. What was your highest rank?

Smith: PFC.

Meyer: PFC. And your service dates? Were you drafted?

Smith: I originally was supposed to go to ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program]. And I was supposed to report to the University of Memphis on January the third, 1944.

Meyer: And when did you finally leave the service?

Smith: I left the service in August the 23rd, 1946. And do you want to know when I was wounded?

Meyer: I'll take that, too.

Smith: I was wounded in Metz, France, on November the 18th, 1944.

[TIME 5:00]

Meyer: That's enough of the preliminary questions. In one of the earlier interviews, we've gone all the way from ASTP through Indiantown Gap. And we got you to the boat, which is the SS Mariposa. So, now I thought we'd just start with the Mariposa.

Smith: Okay.

Meyer: Okay

Smith: We got on the Mariposa, which was the luxury liner in civilian, and there was 5,000 of us on board. It generally took less than 500 passengers in peacetime. And we started from Boston and went up by Greenland. So the second night out on the ocean it got very cold and there was nobody – most of them were sick. I didn't get seasick.

Meyer: You didn't get seasick. That's good.

Smith: So – but you had to stay out on the deck because it was too hot in the cabins.

Meyer: Did the cabins have a lot of bunks?

Smith: Well, the cabins had twelve bunks in them each. And there were twelve, but they were not ventilated as well as they should have been. There wasn't any air conditioner. You just got a chute from the top of the boat down into the room there while the air got very cold. As I remember the first night about midnight everybody was freezing to death because we were up by Greenland. And the boat kept going and kept going back and forth. Zigzagging. Because of enemy boats in the water. But we landed at Liverpool, England, on the fifth day from Boston. The waters got a bit calmer and it got a bit warmer as we approached England. Then we were put on a train at Liverpool, and from there we went to Winchester, England.

Meyer: Barton Stacey? Were you there at Camp Barton Stacey?

Smith: I don't know which one it was. But they had us set up on what they called the Tichborne Estate. And Lord Tichborne had given this over in wartime, his estate, which was quite big. And we all stayed in Quonset huts that had been put up on the estate.

Meyer: Are they wooden?

Smith: Well, I think they were metal buildings, you know, the round one, all the way around. And I don't know who made the beds that were in them, but none of them were long enough for Americans, I'll tell you that [laughs]. They must have been made for the Chinese or somebody, because all of us had our feet over the end of the bunks that they had in there. And we stayed there. And I went on past there to the city of Winchester, England, where the Knights of the Round Table is there, with Sir Lancelot, and all his crew.

Meyer: Did you go that cathedral? That the big, old cathedral?

Smith: Well yes, we went into where the round table was, and the knights of Arthur, and so forth. It was an interesting place. From there I don't know how many days we stayed, but anyway, I got a real big kick out of talking to the natives around there, because you could sit down with them and they could tell you all these tales about Tichborne.

[TIME 10:04]

Tichborne apparently didn't like the poor people that worked for him. And his wife, he told her if she could crawl over everything that she could crawl over-- and she was on her deathbed supposedly--and every bit of land that she could crawl over before she died he would give the production of that land to the poor people on the thing. And she did quite a bit, but she left a curse with him that said, if you don't give this crop that's on this land in a year, she says, your castle will start crumbling. And if you look what attests to that is, at the horse barn, where the horses were kept, the back of the building he didn't give the food and so forth, and the back of the building it was crumbled, of the horse barn.

Meyer: (laughs) It's a good story.

Smith: This was the legend. But there were many legends like that over there, and it was fun to talk to those natives.

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

Meyer: Would you meet them in pubs?

Smith: No, I'd just sit out on a wall and, you know, one of them would come on a Sunday, or they'd just come by and they'd talk to you. And you'd sit down. They'd ask you where you were from and you'd tell them. And we'd get in a conversation. And I'd tell them that I was stationed over on the Tichborne Estate, and most all of them had that tale to tell you about that.

Meyer: Did you go into London at all?

Smith: Well, I got one trip into London. Of course, London was really full of people. And at nighttime everything was black, blacked out. And they had these little penlights that they could just – they looked like a bunch of fireflies in the nights, all the streets and everything.

Meyer: They looked like fireflies because everyone had their penlights on.

Smith: Yeah. And it was quite interesting. And the subways fascinated me more than anything. I think I had a three-day pass on there. And on the days I would get up, I would get on the subway and ride most of the day. I enjoyed that, because I think you put something--a penny or a farthing or whatever it was--in the subway and you could sit there and ride all day. Get off of it at one station and go another way. I had a pretty fair time at that.

Meyer: That sounds fun.

Smith: I went as far as the subway went out of town one or two times. I enjoyed that, but it was historical. I got into the PX [Post Exchange] in London. And we didn't have too much of a variety, but that particular PX I think was the Air Force's. But they had all shirts and things. And I bought several shirts, dress shirts. I don't know what for, but... And a dress pair shoes of shoes, because I didn't have anything but a pair of boots, and put them in my duffel bag. And of course that got lost in the shuffle somewhere. I never saw that again once we went into battle. Then we went down to Bristol, England, and got on a boat—I can't remember the name of it—to go across the channel. And when we got across the channel, I remember that there were four different crews on there.

[TIME 15:00]

They had a cooking crew, which cooked the meals. And obviously the meals had been given, or the food, they just prepared the food that was American. And we had the Dutch, the sailors that sailed the boat. And we had the English, which was on the boat, which were the security of the boat. And then of course they had us, the Americans, they were transporting. And we landed over in France, Omaha Beach.

Meyer: That's what, about D-Day plus 60?

Smith: No, it was D-Day plus about—well, yeah, about 60. Yeah, D-Day plus 60. [brief interruption, side conversation] And they put landing craft over the side of the boat and we all got on that. But it was easy to see when you landed on that beach how so many people were killed on D-Day, because there were a lot of holes that shells had made in the ocean on the beach. And when a man steps off the front of a boat, and he's got 60 pounds of weight on his back, he goes down. And I read later that about 40 percent of the people killed on Omaha Beach on D-Day were drowned. They were not shot.

Meyer: When you looked at the shore, was that the first time you saw evidence of war?

Smith: Well, that's the first, no, we saw evidence of war in England. In other words, the day I went to London was the day that they were dropping these buzz bombs everywhere. (laughs)

Meyer: Did you hear buzz bombs?

Smith: Oh yes, there were probably around the corner from me, but all night long...

Meyer: What did they sound like?

Smith: Well, there's just a big explosion when they hit the ground, but they ran by a little motor. It sounded like a tractor in the field. And when that motor cut off, that's when it dropped. And they didn't have any control over them except that they knew that they would drop in the metropolitan area of London, and when it would drop, bam, it would be down there. And anyway, it was quite an experience to go through.

And then when we got on the beach we had a full load of clothes ourselves. We didn't have our duffel bags. Our duffel bags were piled somewhere and they were going to be dumped off on the beach or something, and we were to pick them up. But we started walking up that hill, and I was a rather young man and in pretty good shape, but that hill got us all. And I thought, how could a man be fighting a battle and going up this hill? Because it was something like, oh, I'd say at least two hundred and fifty feet from the bottom, from the waterline, to the top of that bluff. And there was only one, they explained to us, there was only one path going up there that was empty of land mines. And you were a pretty good target for anybody to get to you because you were in a line going up that hill like ants going up a hill. But after we got on the top of that they moved us into a hedgerow, which, hedgerows were like fences around the plot of ground.

Meyer: Were they like little hills with trees?

Smith: Well, they were hedges and so forth. The way they explained it to us was that the family owned this big piece of property and when they divided it with the kids they'd plant plants around and leave them a certain amount, and then that would be their plot, and then the next kid would get one, and that whole area there was called hedgerows, and they were little areas. So we moved into one of the areas, which was cleared and everything, but there was still fighting. There was some fight left in the hedgerows, but the main army, not the 95th, had moved forward and was almost to Paris.

[TIME 21:07]

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

And I understand that the big breakthrough came for the army ahead of us at Saint-Lô. They said that they had, on July the 4th, before we got there, and said that they bombed that city from the air, and said that there wasn't anything standing in Saint-Lô that was higher than four feet. And the soldiers that I talked to later that fought in Saint-Lô said but it was still full of Germans. Said when we attacked the city, there were Germans all over the place. So anyway. [brief interruption, side conversation]

Meyer: So you're in the hedgerows; are you in the two-man tents?

Smith: No, we were in the hedgerows. [more interruption] We lived in the hedgerow till about August, the end of August, as well as I remember. And then they put us on a train.

Meyer: Those forty-and-eights?

Smith: Forty-and-eights.

Meyer: Will you tell me what that's like?

Smith: Well, it's like a big boxcar, and you just get in it. And you squeeze your way in there, and you know, you're laying and crowded with everybody else. And as it makes a stop—and they made several stops—it's very rough riding because they don't have any brakes on those cars. They just have a bumper. And it bumps the next car. And when it starts it bumps the back car. And you bump each way. When they go to stop you get a big bump and when you start you get a big bump. But they would stop—and we had one guy on there that was a coffee nut, and he would start a fire on the side of the railroad track and make a thing of coffee, and just pour a big lot of coffee in a great big can of water, and he'd drink the grounds and all [laughs]. And then we'd get back on the train. And we went through—on that trip, we went through Versailles, and then Paris, and then we went beyond Paris. And then we got into a bivouac area, as I remember, and we were to relieve the 5th Division. And the 5th Division apparently had gotten clobbered right before the battle.

[TIME 25:24]

Meyer: So now you're all the way near Alsace-Lorraine, you're across France?

Smith: Yeah, we're across France, and we were to relieve the 5th Division in battle. But this was before what they called the second D-Day. The second D-Day came on November the 7th, and we were...

Meyer: What happened then, the second D-Day?

Smith: Well, that was kickoff for the ground troops. The Air Force, their D-Day, their kickoff day on November the 7th was earlier that night, I think at one o'clock in the morning. Ours was six o'clock in the morning. And we were to start moving forward and relieving the 5th Division, which had really gotten clobbered out there. And there were still a lot of bodies out there, and it was cold enough to preserve them.

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

Meyer: So it's cold?

Smith: Oh, yes, it's real cold.

Meyer: Was it raining at all?

Smith: And raining all the time. You couldn't dig six inches deep until it'd fill up with water, so foxholes were sort of obsolete because you couldn't get any digging done. And as I remember, we did a lot of patrol. We didn't actually go bim-bam right into the thing. We were in a holding area around some hills, and we could see the enemy.

Meyer: You could?

Smith: Yeah, we could see him and he could see us. And old Pat Cane (PH), our mortar sergeant, he used to love to—we didn't have too much ammunition until November, so before November we used to just watch them, and they would watch us, and we would wave back and forth. And Pat would try to knock 'em off the latrine. He says, when they'd get on their latrine, because all the latrines were just boxes over a hole, and it was sort of hard to keep the hole—and it rained a lot. And he would shoot a few mortars, what the quota was for the day, because I'm sure that we didn't have enough—we had ammunition, but not enough to sustain a war. And Patton was very upset about not getting ammunition, and the gas had stopped, the gasoline for the tanks.

Meyer: Yeah, they were sending it up north.

Smith: And the supplies were limited. Except we did eat pretty good, of C-rations and D-rations, and things like that. But they tried to give us one hot meal a day while we were in that holding situation.

Meyer: Now, what's your job now during the holding situation, what did they have you do? What was your job?

Smith: Well, we would go on patrols at night.

Meyer: You were like a scout?

Smith: Well, no, we would go on a patrol, like five, six of us. And we would go out. And I think what we were mainly doing, it seemed to me like what we were mainly doing, we're trying to recover the men that had been killed in the 5th Division and bring them back, because they were actually frozen, so they weren't disintegrated.

[TIME 30:00]

And I know we looked at all these things and we'd go on these patrols. And then on November the 7th—and Patton told us this—Patton and Roosevelt were not too good of buddies, and Patton

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

didn't like Roosevelt at all. And he made the statement several times that we wouldn't start this war again until Roosevelt got elected. Well, he got elected on November the 7th [laughs], and that's the day that the war started again in full blast, and that's the day that we started going toward Metz and so forth. And between November the 7th, the morning of November the 7th, we had full coverage of Air Force, we had tanks everywhere. And we were in full war then. I managed to stay alive, or stay whole, until November the 18th, from November the 7th till November the 18th.

Meyer: What were you doing during that time?

Smith: Well, we were advancing with battles every day. We were taking little villages and leapfrogging over, you know, a platoon would take this town...

Meyer: Company I, was that heavy – was it a weapons company?

Smith: It seems to me when I came back – of course, being a private, I didn't know what was going on. But it seems that when I talked to Lieutenant Crawford when we got back, or when we started going to these reunions, he said, "Well, what we were doing, we were leapfrogging these little villages until we got to Metz. And our goal was Metz."

And on November the 18th we had just taken some little town out there, a little village, not a town, really. And in that village we had captured a jillion prisoners. And I was assigned the night before November the 18th to the post office, because that's where they'd brought all the prisoners. And by the time I got there I could understand what a German was saying by catching one or two words and putting it together to a sentence. And I was conversing pretty good with them in the post office. And we got, several people got wounded on that drive up.

I remember a funny incident, because we went into a two-story house in that village and it was just about dark, and the guy said, the sergeant came to me and he says, "Go up in that attic and see if there's anybody in there."

And I said, "You want me to stick my head up in that attic?"

And he says, "Yeah."

And I said, "You be me. You go up there and stick your head up there." I said, "If there's anybody in that attic they'll blow your head off when you stick it up in there." [laughs]

[Interrupted by people talking in background]

[TIME 34:00]

Meyer: Go back just a little bit, because they were talking when... so you're in the post office.

Smith: Yeah, I'm in the post office with a lot of prisoners, and I'm one of them supposed to be guarding them. And there wasn't much to be guarded because they were really willing to be captured. And they weren't going to run, and they certainly weren't going to try to harm you. But after, we got several people hit by snipers that night. I remember a friend of mine got hit. He was out in the street and some sniper picked him off.

But the next morning, as well as I remember, we moved out toward Metz which was our final destination. And it seems like what Lieutenant Crawford told me was that we were in a wedge going toward Metz, a column of us on one side of the road and a column on the other.

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

And the orders were not to take any prisoners, just spread them out. But what we were to get to was across that bridge and into Metz, because the bridge led right into Metz. And the little road that came up to it, I don't know, that was from that village that we'd just taken the day before. And as we were going up there...

Meyer: Do you remember walking— was it another cold day, cold rainy day?

Smith: Oh yeah, it was a cold rainy day. It rained practically every day. And I remember that it was just about dawn, because it was pretty dark when we assembled. And then we were walking down the road in single file on each side of that little country road, and they were shooting at us from the hills on both sides of the road and some of the forts up in the hills.

Meyer: So the forts around Metz, they're shooting at you —?

Smith: The forts around Metz. And a lot of us were getting wounded. And I got wounded about seventy-five to a hundred yards before we got to the bridge.

Meyer: So you're walking up to the bridge, and what side of the road are you on?

Smith: I'm on the left-hand side.

Meyer: You're on the left-hand side, single file.

Smith: Single file.

Meyer: And it's just a little after dawn, it's still dark?

Smith: Yeah, it's beginning to get light then, and like I say, they were shooting big guns. But we had tanks with us, and they were shooting back, and we had artillery that was coming along behind. And they were firing, too. It was a running battle down that road to that bridge. Well, when I got wounded I went down. The guy in front of me was killed. And the guy in back of me was still standing. His name was Scannell (PH). And Scannell came up to me, and I was down on the ground, and he said, I said, "You better look at him up there, I think he's worse than I am." The guy that fell with the same shell.

And he says, "No, he's gone. He's blown away." He says, "How are you?"

And I said, "Well, I feel all right," but I said, "I'd like for you to look at my left leg, because I can't feel it and I don't think I have it."

And he looked at my left leg, and he says, "Yeah, you've got it." He says, "It's all right." And at that point he told me, he says his arm, his left arm, was badly wounded, but he could still walk. And he says, "I'm going to walk back to where the medics are working, and I'll send one up for you."

And I said, "Okay, that's fine."

And at that point I was still conscious. I wasn't hurting. You know, I was numb on my left side, and I could feel blood, warm blood. And I thought, well, they'll be here momentarily, I'm sure.

[TIME 40:30]

And I was looking up and just as the body of the company that I was in got on the bridge, they blew it up. And there was bodies going both sides. And I said, my God. I said, that's the whole company right there, is gone. And I think that they had something— I don't know how many were killed, but there were about twenty or so wounded in that thing, and there was a bunch of them killed. That was the worst day that the I Company had in the whole war as far as casualties were concerned, mainly because of that bridge.

Meyer: I remember there was a Vince Kaufman (PH). Remember Ed Kaufman (PH), he came, his brother.

Smith: Yeah. Yeah.

Meyer: He was supposed to lead – I remember he went over some bridge when they blew it up.

Smith: Yeah, that was the bridge that we had to go over to get into town. Or swim, and you couldn't swim because there's ice floating down the river. Anyway, I didn't get to the river. And in the meantime, I laid on the ground and nobody came. And I wouldn't say how long it was. But there was a German that had gotten behind our line, and he came up to me. And I was the only one there that was alive, around the area. And he looked down at me and asked me, he says... I don't really know what he asked me. But I told him, would he get me some water out of my canteen? And he says nein, no. And then he backed off across the road to the other side. And I was looking at him. And he pulled a little pistol out of his boot, and he shot. Shot at me and he hit me in the chest. But it just grazed me. And I said, I better lay still here [laughs] or he's going to come over here and put it in my head.

And I came back with that. And I had a German doctor that was my ward doctor in the hospital in the States. And I told him that story, and ... I said, "I know we weren't to take any prisoners that day and people would get behind us and so forth," but I said, "He didn't have any rifle or anything like that, and he didn't have any marking on him at all."

And the German doctor that had been kicked out of Germany in 1938 and come to the States and gotten in the U.S. Army, he told me, he says, "Well, you know that their medics can carry a mercy pistol." And I said, no, I didn't know that their medics could carry a mercy pistol. And he says, "Yes, they carry a little .25-caliber, and if they determine that you're too far gone, they shoot you."

And I said, "Well, you know, he looked about like me," I said, "He was a blond and blue eyes and everything."

[TIME 45:13]

And he says, "I suspect that's what you've got."

So I said, "Well, I don't know what he was, but he didn't have any markings on him. He didn't have any red cross on him. He didn't have anything. He just had a big overcoat on." And I said, "I'm sure he could have got a better shot at me, because he was standing right over me, talking to me. And then he backed across the whole road and he reached down in his boot and he pulled out that pistol. And I looked at that pistol and I said, 'Oh, boy, here we go.'"

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

And that was the end of that. Well, less than fifteen minutes later—and he was gone—a jeep came and picked me up and put me on the hood, and we went back to the field hospital.

Meyer: I have a question right there. When they put you on the hood, did they just drape you over the hood or...?

Smith: No, no, they put you on a stretcher, and then the jeeps, you let the windshield down and they had a bar in the back and they put you over the front, and then they had another rack in the back that they could put another guy on, crosswise on the back on a stretcher.

Meyer: Thanks for making that clear.

Smith: So we went to the hospital, you know, the field hospital. And they thought I was a Kraut, because I was blond-headed and blue-eyed. And one doctor—I was going in and out of consciousness, and one doctor said, “Don’t bother with him yet, he’s a Kraut.” And I had the strength to say, “I’m no damn Kraut!” I said, “I’m an American.”

And with that they all jumped over to me. And the last thing I remember at that time was they cutting off my clothes. I remember them taking a pair of scissors and going up my trousers and cutting my clothes off of me. And then I went into the operating room. And from there I went to a hospital, the 30th Field Hospital, I remember that, and I woke up two days later. And at that time penicillin was brand new, and it was allotted to you by ration. So I was one of them that was getting the full ration of every three hours for 72 hours. And there was certain ones that got it, because it was a brand-new thing, and we got a lot of sulfa drugs. Sulfa was pretty handy. But then the other, penicillin, was hard to get.

Meyer: Are you in a field hospital?

Smith: I’m in a field hospital, and I’m in a school building. When I woke up it was about, oh, thirty people in that room on cots. And from there, I went back to the back line; I was going back to England. And I remember [laughs], as another funny incident, because as they were transferring us back within ten days after we got wounded, we went from one place to the other. And we finally got to the air station, the airplane that was going to pick us up and take us to England. There was a great big tent there. And they took us down in ambulances, and they lined us up on the ground, waiting on the airplanes. They didn’t know whether there’d be any airplanes that afternoon because the weather was so bad until they couldn’t fly into that airstrip – we were all at an airstrip. And we’re laying out there in the rain, and I said, “What’s in that big tent?”

And he says, “Well, they’ve captured this German general that had Metz, or was in charge of Metz. And they’re waiting on an airplane to take him back to Washington.”

And I said, “And he’s got the whole tent, and he’s dry, and I’m wet?”

And the guy says—he was a doctor, he was a major—and he says, “Yeah, I don’t know why that is.” He says, “Hell!”

And he immediately ordered the bunch to pick us all up and take us in the tent. Put that general out on the end. [laughter] But the general had the whole tent! And we got a ride back – the planes did come that afternoon. And a C-47 is very uncomfortable, to say the least.

[TIME 51:26]

Smith, Harrell; Army, PFC; Company I/378th/95th WWII

Meyer: Are you in a stretcher?

Smith: Oh, yeah, I'm on a stretcher all the time. Yeah. With one of those army blankets over you. And when they get wet they're like a towel, they fill up with water. But anyway, we got back and we flew into England. Oxford, England. Airstrip out there. And we went to a hospital there. And after that ride I said, "I'm not taking any more rides in C-47s." I said, "That's too uncomfortable." Because you've got to lay in one position. You can't move.

And anyway, after it was over, before Christmas, they came and asked me if I wanted to be home by Christmas. And I said, "Yeah, I'd love to." But I said, "How am I going to get there?"

And they said, "We've got some planes that are flying soldiers back from the Bulge," and said, "we can put you on one of those and take you right back to the States."

And I said, "No, I'll wait for a boat." [laughs]. And so I waited till February the 14th of '45, and I caught a boat, a hospital boat, one of the most pleasant rides I've ever had. Although I didn't get out, I was still bedridden. But they would take me out on the stretcher in the morning and put me on the deck. And it was nice and cool, and we were taking the southern route. And we saw a German boats pass and we had a great big red cross on top of us.

Meyer: Mr. Smith, let me ask you this right now. Since we've divided up your interview so many times, I wondered if I could divide it up one more time. Because Mr. [Baden?]

Smith: Oh, yeah, well, I'm through...

Meyer: No, no, no, because I have a few more specific questions I want to ask you.

Smith: Oh, catch me sometime, and...

Meyer: I'll catch you later on tonight, or if you're... I'm just going to stay right here since this is a perfect place.

Smith: Yeah, this is a good place. Yeah, I'll come back around here this afternoon.

[TIME: 54:03]

End Session